

## Mountain Identity and Development Aspirations

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### Abstract

This article refers to management issues of mountainous areas, with emphasis on the built environment, highlighting "identity" as a key element for development perspectives and aspirations. Mountain areas are addressed as a system, the identity of which has to be recognized, in terms of protection, promotion, and integrated development. The concept of identity is explored through its reference to the elements that constitute mountain settlements, as well as the conditions of its recognition, protection, and promotion. Further, through the idea of the deliberate "construction" of place-identity and its correlation to the development process, mountain settlements are discussed. References are made to key concepts related to the issues, such as tradition, tangible and intangible, and the cultural and economic importance of its preservation, considering culture as a key pillar for integrated development. In this context, key issues concerning development aspirations include the component elements of the cultural character and identity of mountainous settlements, its problems, the changes, and the dangers that may threaten them, the relationship between its integrated protection and sustainable development, as well as the problems and strategies of creating and implementing a management plan that ensures its preservation, protection, and invigoration. The article is founded on the research that took place within the framework of the postgraduate program, "Environment and Development of Mountains Regions", annually held at the Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Center (MIRC) in the Hellenic Mountain Area of Metsovo, Greece.

### Keywords

Place identity; Tradition; Mountain settlements; Preservation; Protection; Integrated development

### Introduction

This article refers to management issues concerning mountainous areas, with emphasis on the built environment, highlighting

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“identity” as a key element for development perspectives and aspirations. Mountain areas are addressed as a system, the identity of which we ought to recognize, in terms of protection, promotion, and integrated development. The concept of identity will be explored through the reference to the elements that constitute mountain settlements, as well as the conditions of its recognition, protection, and promotion. Also, the subject will be understood through the idea of the deliberate “construction” of identity and its relation to development process. Moreover, reference needs be made to key concepts related to the issues, such as the concept of tradition, tangible and intangible, and the cultural and economic importance of its preservation, considering culture as a key pillar of integrated development. In this context, key issues concerning development aspirations include the component elements of the cultural character and identity of mountainous settlements, the problems of mountain settlements, the changes, and the dangers that threaten them, the relationship between integrated protection and sustainable development, problems and strategies of creating and implementing a management plan ensuring the preservation, protection, and development.

The above tenets are founded on an academic course concerning “Identity and development prospects of mountain areas”, a course organized within the framework of the postgraduate program, “Environment and Development of Mountains Regions”, organized at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens. The program is the only one that focuses on the study of the mountainous regions of Greece, which nevertheless cover almost 70% of the country’s total area. The aim of the course is the study of the specific challenges and opportunities being presented by the mountainous areas. It is based on multidisciplinary education, and it, moreover, offers to the students the opportunity not only to study but to live in the mountain regions. The recognition of the mountain settlements proposed through the course, presented in this paper, is a methodological tool for the students, for field research, exercises, dissertations, and often diploma projects in the context of the postgraduate program.

The program is held annually in the Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Center (MIRC) in the Hellenic Mountain area of Metsovo, an interdepartmental Laboratory organized by NTUA, in a research center for mountainous environments and the local cultures (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Life in Metsovion Interdisciplinary Research Center (MIRC) (Photos by Elena Konstantinidou)

### Definitions (Key Concepts)

The basic concepts and definitions are closely correlated to the subject of this paper. Firstly, *Cultural Heritage*, defined by UNESCO in its Draft Medium Term Plan 1990-

1995<sup>1</sup>, as *“the entire corpus of material signs - either artistic or symbolic - handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience... The idea of heritage has now been broadened to include the human and the natural environment, both architectural complexes and archaeological sites, the rural heritage, and the countryside... Furthermore, the preservation of the cultural heritage now covers the non-physical cultural heritage, which includes the signs and symbols passed on by oral transmission, artistic and literary forms of expression, languages, ways of life, myths, beliefs and rituals, value systems and traditional knowledge and know-how”*.

The term *landscape* is defined by the European Landscape Convention<sup>2</sup> of the Council of Europe, Florence 2000, as *“the landscape is part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings”*. Each landscape forms a blend of components and structures: types of territories, social perceptions and ever-changing natural, social and economic forces. Once this identification work has been completed and the landscape quality objectives are set, the landscape can be protected, managed or developed.

Similarly, the concept of *Architectural Heritage* is defined by the European Charter of Architectural Heritage<sup>3</sup>, Amsterdam 1975, as *“the European architectural heritage consists not only of the most important monuments: it also includes the groups of lesser buildings in old towns and characteristic villages in their natural or manmade settings. ... The architectural heritage is an expression of history and helps us to understand the relevance of the past to contemporary life”*.

Another key concept is the concept of *tradition*. The concept of tradition was firstly formed, in correlation to the concept of the folk culture, during the end of the 18th century and afterwards, as a reaction to the centralized European civilization. It was, firstly, the result of a reaction of the German and northern European ethnicities, against the cultural and political pressure exerted upon them by the southern European countries. In contradiction to the accelerated speed of progress of the southern European countries that destroyed primordial values, European romanticism proposed the respect to the age-long existence of the tradition and the folk culture in many ways associated to the ‘sublime’ nature (Löwy and Sayre, 2001). The anti-historical quality of the previous three referential domains, as presented by the European romanticism, was presented as existing outside the tormented continuous transformation of history.

However, could such a cultural and political condition be possible, especially in the geopolitical context of the European continent? Contemporary theoretical criticism associates the concept of tradition with the formation of the concept of nations (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and the creation of the neoteric nation states. Social groups claiming to possess a genuine ethnic identity that survived unaltered for centuries may demand a differentiated nationality and, thus, the formation of a nation

<sup>1</sup> Draft Medium Term Plan 1990-1995 (UNESCO, 25 C/4, 1989, p.57)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/the-european-landscape-convention>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.icomos.org/en/resources/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/170-european-charter-of-the-architectural-heritage>

state. In this way, tradition was many times invented, in order to compensate pressures exerted by other ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, even in the territory of the eastern Mediterranean, where historic changes continuously transformed social and cultural contexts, we could not disregard cultural formations, which seem to survive for centuries. The word ‘tradition’ itself derives from the Latin ‘tradere’ literally meaning to transmit, to hand over, and to give for safekeeping (Moraitis, 2013).

To the previous stabilized cultural formations, the *identity* of a social group may be closely correlated; and unaltered habits and beliefs seem to defend and conserve the genuine cultural qualities of the social group. However, the identity is also a matter of the ongoing historical transformation; it could be a continuous association to an active historical process. Thus, identity may be regarded as the sum of all the inherent characteristics of a social group and of all the possible tendencies of its future development that have to be recognized, amplified and promoted. It is in the same way that we analyze the identity of a place, recognizing its inherent characteristics and its possible tendencies as well. We may then continue and discuss the subject of the place identity and its promotion, usually described under the place branding and, thus, correlated to the economic development of the place and the local societies, to its touristic appeal and to the expansion of its consummative character.

However, place identity and its promotion, or place branding, appear also to be of central cultural and political importance, as they may strengthen as well the place pride of the inhabitants of a place. The feeling that they live in a place of local interest has to preserve its important qualities, correct its inadequacies and insist on its future opportunities of development.



Figure 2: Kastanitsa, Kynouria, Peloponnese, Greece (Photo by Elena Konstantinidou)

### **Mountainous Settlements: Components of Identity**

In Greece, the mountainous landscape is formed by small settlements, large in numbers and variety. They are located over a large geographical area, often isolated



from each other due to geomorphological constraints and lack of communication infrastructure. The issue of identity is central in the management of mountainous areas. Mountainous areas are treated as a single system, the identity of which we must recognize, in terms of protection, promotion, and integrated development. The identity of a place may be considered as is a palimpsest of spatial and social phenomena that evolve and transform through time. It consists of tangible and intangible elements, as well as of the wider place formation, physically and culturally considered as the landscape. It is thus established by its *physical, spatial, and human elements*. The physical elements are geographical elements, climate, flora and fauna. They also refer to topography, morphology of the ground, natural relief and orientation.

The creation of settlements has always been correlated to real needs – considered essential and timeless values. We may, for example, refer to sparing, economy, and social data, as well as to a number of additional parameters as to the selection in terms of interconnection with neighbouring settlements, visual communication, views, water sources, quality of topography, safety, climate, sunshine, cultivation or forests for the supply of materials. Settlements are, moreover, located in association with other landmarks or places of importance and significance, a phenomenon rather common in Greece.

The natural landscape, geomorphology, and relief influence the creation and development of the settlements to the maximum extent, and we may comment that traditional ekistics formations are usually located in a way and scale to harmonize with their environment – to become a naturalized, constitutive element of it (e.g., the settlement of Kastanitsa in Peloponnese, see Figure 2). Climate is of great importance for the configuration of the complexes, their general formal outline, as well as for the location of the buildings, and free open spaces. The construction materials are related to natural materials, while constructions take advantage of the environmental characteristics (organized according to bioclimatic principles). The mountain settlements are located in natural environments with abundance and diversity. The free development of nature, the creation of rich ecosystems, the natural environment exhibits large-scale diversity, high steep mountains, ravines, rivers, abundant springs, and rich/varied vegetation.



Figure 3: Lagadia, Arcadia, Peloponnese, Greece (Photo by Elena Konstantinidou)

Although, the way we perceive space is not only visual. The identity of a place is associated with aesthetic qualities, visual, acoustic, olfactory, tactile (Stefanou, 2000). Qualities concerning the satisfaction of the human senses contribute significantly to the determination of the character of a place. The colour, scents, tastes, sounds, etc. establish a place and contribute, in a way, to the diachronic link between the present and the past. Human data relates to social activities, historical, economic, demographic characteristics and its traces in the field. Human elements also present dynamics of a site as defined in relation to the population composition, social structures, economic and productive activities, and cultural elements (history, mythology, customs, religious traditions, etc.).

Furthermore, the spiritual and cultural elements, the “Genius Loci” of a place, form part of its identity (Norberg-Schulz, 1979), which is perceived by the process of collective memory (such as reason and myth, narratives, literature, cinema, painting, photography, etc.). Even the name of a place often contains and expresses the history, the tradition, and the spatial peculiarities. Let us refer, for example, to the village of Lagadia in Peloponnese (Figure 3). The morphological configuration of the land on which they were built probably gave the name of the settlement (Lagadi means gorge, ravine, or torrent). The historical identity of a place is composed of the grid of the monuments, landmarks, archaeological sites, sites associated with historical events, which are, therefore, closely tied to the collective memory of its inhabitants.

However, apart from the tangible cultural heritage, we may also find out important intangible references, for example, in the case of Metsovo (Figure 4), with Vlach origins, scholars, national benefactors, creators of local art and crafts, and the production of livestock products and household appliances. All of them constitute elements of the identity of the place.



Figure 4: Metsovo, Epirus, Greece (Photo by Elena Konstantinidou)

Another important element of identity has to do with the professional activities of the inhabitants, which are often preserved through the centuries, as in the case of the settlement of Stemnitsa in the Peloponnese (Figures 5, 6). There, since the post-Byzantine years, metallurgy flourished, mainly silversmithing and goldsmithing, which still survives till today thanks to the craftsmen silversmiths, who continue to work and manufacture products of local tradition, but mainly thanks to the operation of the Technical Vocational School of Silver and Goldsmithing.



The identity of *built environments* concerns the typological, morphological, and structural elements of the sites (Konstantinidou, 2011). Each settlement forms a “composition” of buildings and free spaces. Key components of the spatial elements refer, among others, to the relationship of natural and built environments, the structure and organization of urban space, road and path network, squares and Free Spaces, reference points, as well as the features of buildings and public space. The form and function of the urban fabric are very important, as is the street grid and open space. In general, in the mountainous settlements of Greece, the public space, streets, squares, and gathering places, are all in complete interdependence with the natural element.



Figures 5 & 6: School of Silver Craftmanship, Stemnitsa, Arcadia, Peloponnese, Greece (Photos adapted from <http://iek-stemn.ark.sch.gr/>)

*Buildings* constitute a fundamental factor in the physiognomy of a place, especially houses that are the most prevalent type of buildings composing the settlements. Elements as scale, volume, proportion, size, shape, material, constitute an important part of the identity of a place. It is, therefore, important to recognize their structure, form, and construction. The components of the identity of a settlement, as suggested above through the identification procedure, avail the tools to design and define the parameters for the protection strategy and sustainable development.



Figure 7: Vathia, Mani, Peloponnese, Greece (Photo by Elena Konstantinidou)

### Changes/Problems/Dangers

Various problems and dangers threaten mountain settlements. The problem underlies the *phenomenon of abandonment* related to social causes, natural disasters, or

emergencies, and also the geomorphological causes (e.g., the settlement of Vathia in Mani, see Figure 7). In Greece, the abandonment of mountain settlements (during the period 1950s to 1970s) is associated with the mass movement of their inhabitants to cities, resulting in the desertification of mountainous areas. The majority of abandoned mountain settlements remained “untouched” by interventions and alterations; there is thus a fertile ground through a suitable design for its strengthening or even reuse. Regarding “alive” settlements, in the effort to coordinate with contemporary needs, threats and problems are identified, some of which are environmental problems, natural disasters, and hyper-tourism. These problems are usually related to the alteration of the “image” and “contour” of the place, contemporary expansions, new constructions and additions, which are incompatible with the existing built environment. They also refer to a shift in the relation of built and non-built, natural and structured, due to inadequate building regulations, and also alterations of historic buildings as well as the form and function of public space.

Furthermore, problems are related to a lack of financial resources, a lack of will and incentives, and generally the socio-economic changes that often lead to the relocation of residents and the economically active population; thus, the loss of the traditional cultural expressions and characteristics of the local and topical way of life occurs.

Moreover, *changes* and *problems* occur in the intangible elements that constitute the cultural heritage of the place: customs and traditions, traditional techniques and cultural practices, functions acquired over time, activities of the inhabitants facing risks of extinction, alteration, or degradation due to socio-economic changes. Thus, there is often abandonment of settlements by permanent residents, as a consequence of immigration of the economically active population and young people, through the introduction of new intensive uses with catastrophic requirements for the scale of the place, occupation of public space, and alteration of its form and operation, and due to excessive increase in land prices. All the above problems and threats may be addressed through legislative and administrative measures resulting from planning and development strategies, as well as through incentives and tools for the activation of the residents.

### Protection and Development Planning and Aspirations

The concepts of *Protection and Development* evolved through important international documents, Charters, Declarations, and Recommendations. Specifically for historical settlements, including several mountainous settlements, the declarations from international organizations (as Icomos, Unesco, Council of Europe) highlight the values, threats, and the process of planning for their protection.<sup>4</sup> International texts (see Box 1) highlight the trend that is gradually being imposed to address the problems concerning protection of cultural heritage, which combines the actions of preservation and protection of cultural property with sustainable development. The concept of “*Protection*” nowadays is identified with the concept of “*Active Development*”, aiming to integrate mountainous settlements into the current reality and also ensuring viability in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> Particular reference is made to Nairobi Recommendation, 1976, Charter of Historic Cities - map of Washington in 1987, Vienna Memorandum in 2005, and VALETTA Principles, Malta 2011



The *planning of protection and development* presupposes the management of the changes taking place in the settlements, while contemporary approaches accept today's reality for change and the need for its management. The methodology of a sustainable design process should be based on a deep understanding of the identity of the cultural context, its characteristics, mutations, and also its problems.

*Box 1: Basic Principles Texts on the subject of the Protection and Management of Cultural Heritage*

- 1964 - The Venice Charter
- 1972 - World Heritage Convention (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Paris)
- 1975 - European Charter of the Architectural Heritage, COUNCIL OF EUROPE
- 1975 - The Declaration of Amsterdam
- 1976 - Nairobi Charter (Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, Nairobi)
- 1987 - The Washington Charter (Charter on the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas), ICOMOS
- 1994 - The Nara Document on Authenticity, Japan
- 1998 - The New Charter of Athens (the principles of ECTP for the planning of cities)
- 2000 - European Landscape Convention, Florence, COUNCIL OF EUROPE
- 2005 - Vienna Memorandum (on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape”, UNESCO)
- 2005 - Faro Convention (Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society), Council of Europe
- 2011 - The Valletta Principles (for the Safeguarding and Management of Historical Cities, Towns and Urban Areas, ICOMOS)
- 2011 - Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, Paris, UNESCO

An essential condition is the development of a *Protection Plan*, based on an Urban Plan with a comprehensive exploration and inquiry of cultural, technical, social, and economic values. The Protection Plan must cover all the tangible and intangible elements, establishing a proposal of Promotion, combined with a Management Plan, which is monitored. The respect and promotion of all values and the historicity of the place should be ensured while maintaining the overall image of the site and its relationship to the natural and built environment. It should also protect the structure, form, and function of the traditional urban fabric in its entirety, maintain the important historical buildings and elements in the wider environment, and protect the functional character of a settlement and its socio-economic identity. It is also important to consider and protect the cultural diversity and multiculturalism of the place.

An integrated protection plan (or an integrated renewal program) should include several measures: administrative measures to resolve operational, traffic, and other problems, while social measures to complement the social and cultural equipment, to enhance the functioning of housing, and maintain the quality of life of residents (Maistrou, 2012). Spatial projects also require the revival of abandoned neighborhoods, upgrading, and rehabilitation of significant parts of the public space, improvement of infrastructure networks, ensuring the amenities of contemporary life,

and highlighting the particular physiognomy of the place. Further, important are the legislative measures for the integration of contemporary structures and the protection of the settlement and its individual characteristics.

The strategy of management should aim at preserving the cultural heritage of the place, strengthening traditional occupations, and evaluating the introduction of foreign standards. Providing the inhabitants with the comforts of contemporary life and attracting investments that do not destroy the environment are crucial measures.

## Conclusions

The settlements of the mountainous areas are associated to several important natural and cultural values: the mountainous landscape's quality aesthetics, historic and mnemonic references, traditional cultural formations, economic possibilities, and quality of human life. The importance of these settlements depends not only on its material status but also on the immaterial and intangible values associated with its history or traditions. In addition, it may be considered as par excellence formations for the application of sustainability strategies, as it usually incorporate many environmentally friendly features and bioclimatic elements.

It is, therefore, necessary to recognize the identity and understand the value system of mountain settlements - as total, natural-environmental, structural and man-made qualities - to formulate proposals for its protection and integrated development. The settlements should continue to live and develop as living organisms, utilizing their cultural potential, which can bring the necessary resources for its development. In particular, the advantage of these settlements is its cultural characteristics, which can be a driver for economic development and (possibly) special forms of tourism. Natural resources (natural environment, forests, arable land, landscape), cultural resources (e.g., churches, historic buildings, traditional cobbled streets, etc.), social environment (human scale, quality of life, cultural associations, etc.) are of paramount value. Moreover, the intangible heritage (local festivals, religious festivals, music events, traditional local products, arts, etc.) can be the necessary resources for their complete and sustainable development.

In addition, it is pointed out that the future of the mountainous settlements can be based on its function as a network (nature-loving, mountaineering, cultural, architectural, folk tradition, religious, sports, gastronomic, highlighting the primary sector).

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## Authors' Declarations and Essential Ethical Compliances

### *Authors' Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)*

<i>Contribution</i>	<i>Author 1</i>	<i>Author 2</i>
Conceived and designed the research or analysis	Yes	Yes
Collected the data	Yes	No
Contributed to data analysis & interpretation	Yes	Yes
Wrote the article/paper	Yes	Yes
Critical revision of the article/paper	Yes	Yes
Editing of the article/paper	Yes	Yes
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### *Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)*

The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not directly involved any local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. Neither this study involved any child in any form directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

*(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)*

The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

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